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SUMMARY
OF THE
PRINCIPAL EVIDENCES
FOR THE
TRUTH AND DIVINE ORIGIN
OF THE
Christian Revelation.

DESIGNED CHIEFLY
FOR THE USE OF YOUNG PERSONS.

BY BIELBY, LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

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PREFACE.

FOR readers of a mature age and judgment, there are so many excellent treatises on the Evidences of the Christian Religion already published, that it is perfectly needless to add to their number; but it appeared to me, that there was still wanting something in a shorter, a cheaper, a more methodical and familiar form. This is a time, when it is peculiarly proper to communicate to young people the chief grounds of their faith, and to lay the foundations of a firm belief in the Christian Revelation; leaving it to themselves to add to these primary evidences which reason furnishes in favor of christianity, those

further proofs of its truth, which I trust they will hereafter derive from still higher and better sources ; from an intimate acquaintance with the sacred writings ; from the illuminating and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit upon their understandings and their hearts ; and from the experimental conviction, which I hope they will hereafter have, of the divine efficacy of the gospel in purifying their affections, in remedying the disorders of their corrupt nature, and in communicating to them those two invaluable blessings, peace of conscience, and holiness of life.

IN a concern of such infinite importance, no species of evidence ought to be discouraged, depreciated, or withheld. And at this time more particularly, when new compendiums of infidelity, and new libels on christianity are dispersed continually, with indefatigable industry, through every part of the kingdom, and every class of the com-

munity, it seems highly expedient to meet these hostile attempts with publications of an opposite tendency, and to fortify the minds of those who are just entering into the world, by plain and concise statements of the principal arguments in favor of christianity, against the efforts that will be made to mislead their judgments, corrupt their principles, and shake their belief in the gospel of Christ.

WITH a view therefore of fulfilling this duty towards the youth, more immediately under my care, I have drawn up the following little tract. My chief object has been to collect together into one view, and to compress together in a narrow compass, all the most forcible arguments for the truth of our religion, which are to be found in our best writers, with the addition of such observations of my own as occurred to me in the prosecution of the work. All these I have classed under a few short, clear,

distinct propositions; an arrangement which I have always found most convenient for the instruction of youth, and best calculated to assist their memories, to make strong and durable impressions on their understandings, and to render the important truths of religion most easy to be comprehended and retained in their minds. After this, I would recommend it to my young readers, as they advance in life, to have recourse to one or more of the well known treatises of Grotius, Addison, Clarke, Leslie, Lardner, Beattie, and Paley, on the Evidences of Christianity; to some of whom I am myself much indebted, and to whose masterly writings on that subject, this little work was meant only as a kind of elementary introduction.

I MUST however warn my young disciples, that when they have, by the course of reading here suggested, arrived at a full conviction of the divine

origin of the Christian Religion, they must not imagine that their task is finished, and that nothing more is required at their hands. The most important part of their business still remains to be accomplished. After being satisfied that the Christian Religion comes from God, their next step is to inquire carefully what that religion is, what the doctrines are which it requires to be believed, and what the duties which it requires to be performed. For this purpose it may be useful for them to begin with Gastrell's Christian Institutes, and Archbishop Secker's Lectures on the church catechism. In the first they will find the doctrines and duties of the Christian Religion ranged under their proper heads in the very words of scripture, and in the other they will see most of them clearly and concisely explained by a most able, pious, and judicious divine. After this they may proceed to study the scrip-

tures themselves, and more particularly the new testament, with the assistance of Dr. Doddridge's Family Expositor, to which they should add some of the sermons of our best divines, Bishop Taylor, Barrow, Sherlock and Secker.

WHEN they have thus learnt what Christianity is, and what it demands from them, they will feel it to be their indispensable duty (as it is unquestionably their truest interest) to believe implicitly all the doctrines, and obey with cheerfulness all the commands of their Maker and Redeemer ; to sacrifice to them, and to their own future eternal welfare, all their corrupt passions and irregular desires, to preserve themselves unspotted from the world, and to implore the assistance of divine grace, co-operating with their own most earnest endeavors, to render their belief in the gospel effectual to the sanctification of their hearts, the regulation of their lives, and the salvation of their souls.

I HAVE only to add, that although this little treatise is designed principally for the instruction of youth, yet considered as a kind of recapitulation of the Evidences of Christianity, it may be found of some use to persons of a more mature age, by refreshing their memories, and bringing back to their recollection those proofs of their religion which they have formerly read in larger and more elaborate works, and which they will here see brought together into one point of view.

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SUMMARY
OF THE
PRINCIPAL EVIDENCES
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TRUTH AND DIVINE ORIGIN
OF THE
CHRISTIAN REVELATION.

THE method I intend to pursue in this treatise, is to present to my young readers the following series of propositions, and then to prove distinctly the truth of each.

1. From considering the state of the heathen world, before the appearance of our Lord upon earth, it is evident

that there was an absolute necessity for a revelation of God's will, and, of course, a great probability beforehand that such a revelation would be granted.

II. At the very time when there was a general expectation in the world of some extraordinary personage making his appearance in it, a person called Jesus Christ did actually appear upon earth, asserting that he was the Son of God, and that he was sent from heaven to teach mankind true religion ; and he did accordingly found a religion, which from him was called the Christian Religion, and which has been professed by great numbers of people from that time to the present.

III. The books of the new testament were written by those persons to

whom they are ascribed, and contain a faithful history of Christ and his religion: and the account there given of both, may be securely relied upon as strictly true.

iv. The scriptures of the old testament (which are connected with those of the new) are the genuine writings of those whose names they bear, and give a true account of the Mosaic dispensation, of the historical facts, the divine commands, the moral precepts, and the prophecies which they contain.

v. The character of Christ, as represented in the gospels, affords very strong ground for believing that he was a divine person.

VI. The sublimity of his doctrines and the purity of his moral precepts confirm this belief.

VII. The rapid and successful propagation of the gospel by the first teachers of it, through a large part of the world, is a proof that they were favored with divine assistance and support.

VIII. A comparison betwixt Christ and Mahomet and their respective religions, leads us to conclude, that as the religion of the latter was confessedly the invention of man, that of the former was derived from God.

IX. The predictions delivered by the ancient prophets, and fulfilled in our Saviour, show that he was the Messiah expected by the Jews, and that

he came into the world by divine appointment, to be the great deliverer and redeemer of mankind.

x. The prophecies delivered by our Saviour himself, prove that he was endowed with the foreknowledge of future events, which belongs only to God and to those inspired by him.

xi. The miracles performed by our Lord, demonstrate him to have possessed divine power.

xii. The resurrection, of our Lord from the dead, is a fact fully proved by the clearest evidence, and is the seal and confirmation of his divinity and of the truth of his religion.

These are the several points I shall undertake to prove in the following pages : and if these are clearly made out, there can be nothing more wanting to satisfy every reasonable man, that the Christian Religion is a true revelation from God.

PROPOSITION I.

FROM considering the state of the heathen world, before the appearance of our Lord upon earth, it is evident that there was an absolute necessity for a divine revelation of God's will, and, of course, a great probability beforehand, that such a revelation would be granted.

THEY who are acquainted with ancient history, know perfectly well that there is no one fact more certain and more notorious than this: That for many ages before our Saviour appeared upon earth, and at the time he actually did appear, the whole heathen world, even the politest and most civilized, and most learned nations, were, with a very few exceptions, sunk in the most deplo-

rable ignorance of every thing relating to God and to religion ; in the grossest superstition and idolatry, and in the most abominable corruption and depravity of manners. They neither understood the true nature of God, nor the attributes and perfections which belong to him, nor the worship that was acceptable to him, nor the moral duties which he required from his creatures ; nor had they any clear notions or firm belief of the immortality of the soul, and a state of rewards and punishments in another life. They believed the world to be under the direction of a vast multitude of gods and goddesses, to whom they ascribed the worst passions and the worst vices that ever disgraced human nature. They worshipped also dead men and women, birds and beasts, insects and reptiles, (especially that most odious

and disgusting reptile the serpent) together with an infinite number of idols, the work of their own hands, from various materials, gold, silver, wood, and stone. With respect to their own conduct, they were almost universally addicted to the most shocking and abominable vices; even many of their solemn religious ceremonies and acts of devotion were scenes of the grossest sensuality and licentiousness. Others of them were attended with the most savage and cruel superstitions, and sometimes even with human sacrifices.

The description given of the ancient Pagans by St. Paul, in the first chapter of his epistle to the Romans, is strictly and literally true. "They were filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, uncleanness,

maliciousness, full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity ; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful.”

These are not the mere general declamations of a pious man against the wickedness of the times ; they are faithful and exact pictures of the manners of the age, and they are fully and amply confirmed by contemporary heathen writers. They are applied also to a people, highly civilized, ingenious, learned, and celebrated for their proficiency in all liberal arts and sciences. What, then, must have been the depravity of the most barbarous nations,

when such were the morals of the most polite and virtuous?

There were, it is true, among all the ancient nations, and especially among the Greeks and Romans, some wise and comparatively good men, called philosophers, who had juster notions of morality and religion than the rest of the world, and preserved themselves to a certain degree unpolluted by the general corruption of the times. But these were few in proportion to the great bulk of mankind, and were utterly unable to produce any considerable change in the prevailing principles and manners of their countrymen. They themselves had but very imperfect and erroneous notions respecting the nature and attributes of God, the worship he required, the duties and obligations of

morality, the method of God's governing the world, his design in creating mankind, the original dignity of human nature, the state of corruption and depravity into which it afterwards fell; the particular mode of divine interposition necessary for the recovery of the human race; the means of regaining the favor of their offended Maker, and the glorious end to which God intended finally to conduct them. Even with respect to those great and important doctrines abovementioned, the immortality of the soul, the reality of a future state, and the distribution of rewards and punishments hereafter, they were full of doubt, uncertainty, and hesitation; and rather ardently wished and hoped for, than confidently expected and believed them. But even what they *did* know with any degree of

clearness and certainty, they either would not condescend, or wanted the ability, to render plain and intelligible to the lower orders of the people. They were destitute also of proper authority to enforce the virtues they recommended; they had no motives to propose powerful enough to overrule strong temptations and corrupt inclinations: their own example, instead of recommending their precepts, tended to counteract them; for it was generally (even in the very best of them) in direct opposition to their doctrines; and the detestable vices to which many of them were addicted, entirely destroyed the efficacy of what they taught.

Above all, they were destitute of those awful sanctions of religion, which are the most effectual restraints on the

passions and vices of mankind, and the most powerful incentives to virtue, the rewards and punishments of a future state, which form so essential and important a part of the Christian dispensation.

There was, therefore, a plain and absolute necessity for a divine revelation, to rescue mankind from that gulph of ignorance, superstition, idolatry, wickedness, and misery, in which they were almost universally sunk ; to teach them in what manner, and with what kind of external service, God might most acceptably be worshipped, and what expiation he would accept for sin ; to give them a full assurance of a future state and a future judgment ; to make the whole doctrine of religion clear and obvious to all capacities ; to add weight

and authority to the plainest precepts, and to furnish men with extraordinary and supernatural assistance, to enable them to overcome the corruptions of their nature. And since it was also plainly worthy of God, and consonant to all our ideas, of his goodness, mercy, and compassion to the work of his own hands, that he should thus enlighten, and assist and direct the creatures he had made, there was evidently much ground to expect that such information and assistance would be granted; and the wisest of the ancient heathens themselves thought it most natural and agreeable to right reason to hope for something of this nature.

You may give over, says Socrates, all hopes of amending men's manners for the future, unless God be pleased to

send you some other person to instruct you;* and Plato declares, that whatever is right, and as it should be in the present evil state of the world, can be so only by the *particular interposition of God.*† Cicero has made similar declarations; and Porphyry, who was a most inveterate enemy to the Christian Religion, yet confesses, that there was wanting *some universal method of delivering men's souls, which no sect of philosophy had ever yet found out.*‡

These confessions of the great sages of antiquity, infinitely outweigh the assertions of our modern infidels, "that human reason is fully sufficient to teach man his duty, and enable him to perform it; and that, therefore, a divine

* Plato in Apolog. Socratis.

† Plato de Rep.

‡ Augustin de Civitate Dei, l. 10. c. 32.

revelation was perfectly needless." It is true, that, in the present times, a Deist may have tolerably just notions of the nature and attributes of the Supreme Being; of the worship due to him, of the ground and extent of moral obligation, and even of a future state of retribution. But from whence does he derive these notions? Not from the dictates of his own unassisted reason, but (as the philosopher Rousseau himself confesses*) from those very scriptures which he despises and reviles, from the early impressions of education, from living and conversing in a Christian country, where those doctrines are publicly taught; and where, in spite of himself, he imbibes some portion of that religious knowledge which the sacred writings have every where diffused and

* Vol. ix. p. 71, 12mo. 1764.

communicated to the *enemies* as well as the friends of the gospel. But they who were destitute of these advantages, they who had nothing but reason to direct them, and therefore knew what reason is capable of doing, when left to itself, much better than any modern infidel (who never was, and never can be, precisely in the same predicament ;) these men uniformly declare, that the mere light of nature was *not* competent to conduct them into the road of happiness and virtue ; and that the only *sure and certain guide* to carry men well through this life *was a divine discovery of the truth.** These considerations may serve to shew, that, instead of entertaining any unreasonable prejudices beforehand against the possibility or probability of any divine revelation whatever,

* Plato in Phædone.

we ought, on the contrary, to be previously prepossessed in favor of it, and to be prepared and open to receive it with candor and fairness, whenever it should come supported with sufficient evidence; because, from considering the wants of man and the mercy of God, it appears highly probable that such a revelation would *some time or other* be vouchsafed to mankind.

PROPOSITION II.

AT the very time when there was a general expectation in the world of some extraordinary personage making his appearance in it, a person called Jesus Christ did actually appear upon earth, asserting that he was the Son of God, and that he came from Heaven to teach mankind true religion ; and he did accordingly found a religion, which from him was called, the Christian Religion, and which has been professed by great numbers of people from that time to the present.

IT was necessary just to state this proposition, as the foundation of all the reasoning that is to follow : but the truth of it is so universally acknowl-

edged, that it requires but very few words to be said in support of it.

That there was, about the time of our Saviour's birth, a general expectation spread over the eastern part of the world, that some very extraordinary person would appear in Judæa, is evident both from the sacred history and from Pagan writers. St. Matthew informs us, that when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, there came wise men (probably men of considerable rank and learning in their own country) from the East, saying, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews; for we have seen his star in the East, and are come to worship him?" In confirmation of this, two Roman historians, Suetonius and Tacitus, assert that there prevailed at that time, over the whole

East, an ancient and fixed opinion, that there should arise out of Judæa a person who should obtain dominion over the world.

That at this time, when Augustus Cæsar was Emperor of Rome, a person called Jesus Christ was actually born in Judæa ; that he professed to come from heaven to teach mankind true religion, and that he had a multitude of followers ; the sacred historians unanimously affirm, and several heathen authors also bear testimony to the same facts. They mention the very name of Christ, and acknowledge that he had a great number of disciples, who from him were called Christians. The Jews, though professed enemies to our religion, acknowledge these things to be true ; and none even of the earliest Pagans

who wrote against Christianity, ever pretended to question their reality.—

These things, therefore, are as certain and undeniable as ancient history, both sacred and profane, and the concurrent testimony both of friends and enemies, can possibly make them.

PROPOSITION III.

THE books of the New Testament were written by those persons to whom they are ascribed, and contain a faithful history of Christ and his religion : and the account there given of both, may be securely relied upon as strictly true.

THE books which contain the history of Christ and of the Christian Religion, are the four gospels and the acts of the Apostles. That the gospels were written by the persons whose name they bear, namely, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, there is no more reason to doubt, than that the histories which we have under the names of Xenophon,

Livy, or Tacitus, were written by those authors.

A great many passages are alluded to or quoted from the Evangelists, exactly as we read them now, by a regular succession of Christian writers, from the time of the Apostles down to this hour; and at a very early period their names are mentioned as the authors of their respective gospels; which is more than can be said for any other ancient historian whatever.*

These books have always been considered by the whole Christian world, from the Apostolic age, as containing a faithful history of their religion, and therefore they ought to be received as

* Lardner's Credibility, b. i. and Paley's Evidences, vol. i.

such ; just as we allow the Koran to contain a genuine account of the Mahometan religion, and the sacred books of the Bramins to contain a true representation of the Hindoo religion.

That all the facts related in these writings, and the accounts given of every thing our Saviour said and did, are also strictly true, we have the most substantial grounds for believing :

For, in the first place, the writers had the very best means of information, and could not possibly be deceived themselves.

And, in the next place, they could have no conceivable inducement for imposing upon others.

St. Matthew and St. John were two of our Lord's Apostles ; his constant companions and attendants throughout the whole of his ministry. They were actually present at the scenes which they describe ; eye witnesses of the facts, and ear witnesses of the discourses, which they relate.

St. Mark and St. Luke though not themselves Apostles, yet were the contemporaries and companions of Apostles, and in habits of society and friendship with those who had been present at the transactions which they record. St. Luke expressly says this in the beginning of his gospel, which opens with these words : " For as much as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which

are most surely believed amongst us : even as *they* delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were *eye witnesses and ministers of the word*, it seemed good to *me* also, *having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first*, to write unto thee, in order, most excellent Theophilus, that thou mightest know the *certainty* of those things wherein thou hast been instructed." St. Luke also being the author of the Acts of the Apostles, we have, for the writers of these five books, persons who had the most *perfect knowledge* of every thing they relate, either from their own personal observation, or from immediate communications with those who saw and heard every thing that passed.

They could not, therefore, be themselves deceived ; nor could they have

the least inducement, or the least inclination, to deceive others.

They were plain, honest, artless, unlearned men, in very humble occupations of life, and utterly incapable of inventing or carrying on such a refined and complicated system of fraud, as the Christian Religion must have been if it was not true. There are, besides, the strongest marks of fairness, candor, simplicity and truth throughout the whole of their narratives. Their greatest enemies have never attempted to throw the least stain upon their characters ; and how then, can they be supposed capable of so gross an imposition as that of asserting and propagating the most impudent fiction ? They could gain by it neither pleasure, profit, nor power. On the contrary, it brought

upon them the most dreadful evils, and even death itself. If, therefore, they were cheats, they were cheats without any motive, and without any advantage; nay, contrary to every motive and every advantage that usually influence the actions of men. They preached a religion which forbids falsehood under pain of eternal punishment, and yet, on this supposition, they supported that religion by falsehood; and whilst they were guilty of the basest and most useless knavery themselves, they were taking infinite pains, and going through the greatest labor and sufferings, in order to teach honesty to all mankind.

Is this credible? Is this possible? Is not this a mode of acting so contrary to all experience, to all the principles of human nature, and to all the usual motives of human conduct, as to exceed

the utmost bounds of belief, and to compel every reasonable man to reject at once so monstrous a supposition.

The facts, therefore, related in the Gospels, and in the Acts of the Apostles, even those evidently miraculous, *must* be true; for the testimony of those who *die* for what they assert is evidence sufficient to support *any* miracle whatever. And this opinion of their veracity is strongly confirmed by the following considerations :

There are, in all the sacred writings of the new testament, continual allusions and references to things, persons, places, manners, customs and opinions, which are found to be perfectly conformable to the real state of things, at that time, as represented by disinterest-

ed and contemporary writers. Had their story been a forgery, they would certainly have been detected in some mistake or other concerning these incidental circumstances, which yet they have never once been.

Then, as to the facts themselves which they relate, great numbers of them are mentioned and admitted both by Jewish and Roman historians ; such as the star that appeared at our Saviour's birth, the journey of the wise men to Bethlehem, Herod's murder of the infants under two years old, many particulars concerning John the Baptist and Herod, the crucifixion of our Lord under Pontius Pilate, and the earthquake and miraculous darkness which attended it. Nay, even many of the miracles which Jesus himself wrought,

particularly the curing the lame and blind, and casting out devils, are, as to the *matters of fact*, expressly owned and admitted by several of the earliest and most implacable enemies of Christianity. For though they ascribed these miracles to the assistance of evil spirits, yet they allowed that the miracles themselves were actually wrought.*

This testimony of our adversaries, even to the miraculous parts of the sacred history, is the strongest possible confirmation of the truth and authority of the whole.

It is also certain, that the books of the new testament have come down to the present times without any material

* Clarke's Evidences of Nat. and Rev. Religion.

alteration or corruption ; and that they are, in all essential points, the same as they came from the hands of their authors.

That in the various transcripts of these writings, as in all other ancient books, a few letters, syllables, or even words, may have been changed, we do not pretend to deny ; but that there has been any designed or fraudulent corruption of any considerable part, especially of any doctrine, or any important passage of history, no one has ever attempted, or been able to prove. Indeed it was absolutely impossible.— There can be no doubt but that, as soon as any of the original writings came out of the hands of their authors, great numbers of copies were immediately

taken, and sent to all the different christian churches. We know that they were publicly read in the religious assemblies of the first christians. We know, also, that they were very soon translated into a variety of foreign languages, and these ancient versions (many of which still remain) were quickly dispersed into all parts of the known world ; nay even several of the original manuscripts remained to the time of Tertullian, at the end of the second century.*— There are numberless quotations from every part of the new testament by christian writers, from the earliest ages down to the present, all which substantially agree with the present text of the sacred writings. Besides which, a variety of sects and heresies soon arose in

* Grotius de Ver. 1. 3. f. 2.

the christian church, and each of these appealed to the scriptures for the truth of their doctrines. It would, therefore, have been utterly impossible for any one sect to have made any material alteration in the sacred books, without being immediately detected and exposed by all the others.* Their mutual jealousy and suspicion of each other would effectually prevent any gross adulteration of the sacred volumes ; and with respect to lesser matters, the best and most able critics have, after the most minute examination, asserted and proved, that the holy scriptures of the new testament have suffered less from the injury of time, and the errors of transcribers,

* Beattie, Vol. i. p. 188.

than any other ancient writings whatsoever.*

* The style, too, of the gospel (says the amiable and elegant author of the *Minstrel*) bears intrinsic evidence of its truth. We find there no appearance of artifice or of party spirit ; no attempt to exaggerate on the one hand, or depreciate on the other ; no remarks thrown in to anticipate objections ; nothing of that caution which never fails to distinguish the testimony of those who are conscious of imposture ; no endeavor to reconcile the reader's mind to what may be extraordinary in the narrative : all is fair, candid, and simple. The historians make no reflections of their own, but confine themselves to matter of fact, that is, to what they heard and saw ; and honestly record their own mistakes and faults, as well as the other particulars of the story. *Beattie's Evidences. v. 1. p. 89.*

PROPOSITION IV.

THE scriptures of the old testament, which are connected with those of the new, are the genuine writings of those whose names they bear, and give a true account of the mosaic dispensation, as well as of the historical facts, the divine commands, the moral precepts, and the prophecies which they contain.

THAT part of the bible, which is called the old testament, contains a great variety of very different compositions, some historical, some poetical, some moral and ^{re}ceptive, some prophetical; written at different times, and by different persons, and collected into one volume by the care of the Jews.

That these books were all written by those whose names they bear, there is not the least reasonable ground to doubt; they have been always considered as the writings of those persons by the whole jewish nation (who were most interested in their authenticity, and most likely to know the truth) from the earliest times down to the present: and no proof to the contrary has ever yet been produced.

That these writings have come down to us in the same state in which they were originally written, as to all essential points, there is every reason to believe. The original manuscripts were long preserved among the Jews. A copy of the book of the law was preserved in the ark; it was ordered to be read publicly every seven years, at the

feast of the tabernacles, as well as privately, and frequently, in every jewish family.

There is a copy still extant, of the five books of Moses (which are called the Pentateuch) taken by the Samaritans, who were bitter enemies to the Jews, and always at variance with them ; and this copy agrees, in every material instance, with the jewish copy.

Near three hundred years before Christ, these scriptures were translated into Greek, and this version (called the Septuagint) agrees also in all essential articles with the Hebrew original. This being very widely spread over the world, rendered any considerable alteration extremely difficult : and the dispersion of the Jews into all the differ-

ent regions of the globe, made it next to impossible.

The Jews were always remarkable for being most faithful guardians of their sacred books, which they transcribed repeatedly, and compared most carefully with the originals, and of which they even numbered the words and letters. That they have not corrupted any of their prophetic writings appears from hence; that we prove Jesus to be the Messiah from many of those very prophecies which they have themselves preserved; and which (if their invincible fidelity to their sacred books had not restrained them) their hatred to Christianity would have led them to alter or suppress. And their credit is still further established by this circumstance, that

our Saviour, though he brings many heavy charges against the Scribes and Pharisees, yet never once accuses them of corrupting or falsifying any one of their sacred writings.

It is no less certain that these writings give a true and faithful account of the various matters which they contain. Many of the principal facts and circumstances related in them, are mentioned by the most ancient heathen authors. The first origin and creation of the world out of chaos, as described by Moses ; the formation of the sun, the moon, and the stars, and afterwards of man himself ; the dominion given him over other animal ; the completion of this great work in six days ; the destruction of the world by a deluge ; the circumstances of the ark and the dove ;

the punishment of Sodom by fire ; the ancient rite of circumcision ; many particulars relating to Moses, the giving of the law, and the jewish ritual ; the names of David and Solomon, and their leagues with the Tyrians ; these things and many others of the same sort, are expressly mentioned, or plainly alluded to, in several Pagan authors of the highest antiquity and the best credit. And a very bitter enemy of the Jews as well as Christians, the Emperor Julian, is, by the force of evidence, compelled to confess, that there were many persons among the Jews, divinely inspired ; and that fire from heaven descended on the sacrifices of Moses and Elijah. Add to this, that the references made to the books of the old testament, and the passages quoted from them by our Saviour and his Apostles, is a plain proof,

that they acknowledged the authority of those writings, and the veracity of their authors.

It is true, indeed, that in the historical books of the old testament, there are some bad characters and bad actions recorded, and some very cruel deeds described ; but these things are mentioned as mere historical facts, and by no means approved or proposed as examples to others. And excepting these passages, which are comparatively few in number, the rest of those sacred books, more especially Deuteronomy, the Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Prophets, are full of very sublime representations of God and his attributes ; of very excellent rules for the conduct of life, and examples of almost every virtue that can adorn human nature. And these

things were written at a time when all the rest of the world, even the wisest, and most learned, and most celebrated nations of the earth, were sunk in the grossest ignorance of God and religion ; were worshipping idols and brute beasts, and indulging themselves in the most abominable vices. It is a most singular circumstance, that a people in a remote, obscure corner of the world, very inferior to several heathen nations in learning, in philosophy, in genius, in science, and all the polite arts, should yet be so infinitely their superiors in their ideas of the Supreme Being, and in every thing relating to morality and religion. This can no otherwise be accounted for, than on the supposition of their having been instructed in these things by God himself, or by persons commissioned and inspired by him ; that is, of their

having been really favored with those divine revelations, which are recorded in the books of the old testament.

With respect to the prophecies which they contain, the truth of a great part of these has been infallibly proved by the exact fulfilment of them in subsequent ages, such as those relating to our Saviour (which will be hereafter specified) to Babylon, to Egypt, to Edom, to Tyre and Sidon. But those which refer more particularly to the dispersion of the Jews are so very numerous and clear, and the accomplishment of them, in the present state of the Jews, is a fact which obtrudes itself, at this moment so irresistibly upon our senses, that I cannot forbear presenting to the reader some of the most remark-

able of those predictions, as they are drawn together by a most able writer.

It was foretold by Moses, that when the Jews forsook the true God, "they should be removed into all the kingdoms of the earth, should be scattered among the heathen, among all people, from the one end of the earth even unto the other ; should become an astonishment, a proverb, and a bye word, among all nations; and that among those nations they should find no ease, neither should the sole of their foot have rest ; but the Lord should give them a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind, and send a faintness into their hearts in the land of their enemies ; so that the sound of a shaken leaf should chase them."* The same things are

* Deut. 28. 25 ; Lev. 26. 33 ; Deut. 4. 27 ; Deut. 28. 64 ; Deut. 28. 37 ; Deut. 28. 65 ; Lev. 26. 36.

continually predicted through all the following prophets : “ That God would disperse them through the countries of the heathen ; that he would sift them among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve ; that in all the kingdoms of the earth, whither they should be driven, they should be a reproach and a proverb, a taunt, and a curse, and an astonishment and a hissing ; and that they should abide many days without a king, and without a prince, and without a sacrifice, and without an image, and without an ephod, and without teraphim,”*

Had any thing like this, in the time of Moses or of the prophets, ever happened to any nation, in the world ? Or

* Ezek. 20. 13 ; 11. 15 ; Amos, 9. 9 ; Jer. 24. 9 ; 29. 18 ; Hosea 3. 4.

was there in nature any probability that any such thing should ever happen to any people? That when they were conquered by their enemies, and led into captivity, they should neither continue in the place of their captivity, nor be swallowed up and lost among their conquerors, but be scattered among all the nations of the world, and hated and persecuted by all nations for many ages, and yet continue a distinct people? Or could any description of the Jews, written at this day, be a more exact and lively picture of the state they have now been in for many ages, than these prophetic descriptions, especially that of Moses, given more than 3,000 years ago.*

* Clarke's Evidences, p. 176, 277.

PROPOSITION V.

THE character of CHRIST, as represented in the gospels, affords very strong ground for believing that he was a divine person.

WHOEVER considers with attention the character of our blessed Lord, as it may be collected from the various incidents and actions of his life (for there are no labored descriptions of it, no encomiums upon it, by his own disciples) will soon discover that it was, in every respect, the most perfect that ever was made known to mankind. If we only say of him what even Pilate said of him, and what his bitterest enemies cannot and do not deny, *that we can find no fault in him*, and that the whole

tenor of his life was entirely blameless throughout, this is more than can be said of any other person that ever came into the world. But this is going a very little way indeed in the excellence of his character. He was not only free from every failing, but possessed and practised every imaginable virtue. Towards his heavenly father he expressed the most ardent love, the most fervent yet rational devotion, and displayed in his whole conduct the most absolute resignation to his will, and obedience to his commands. His manners were gentle, mild, condescending, and gracious: his heart overflowed with kindness, compassion, and tenderness to the whole human race. The great employment of his life was to do good to the bodies and souls of men. In this all his thoughts and all his time were con-

stantly and almost incessantly occupied. He went about dispensing his blessings to all around him in a thousand different ways ; healing diseases, relieving infirmities, correcting errors, removing prejudices, promoting piety, justice, charity, peace, harmony, among men, and crowding into the narrow compass of his ministry more acts of mercy and compassion than the longest life of the most benevolent man upon earth ever yet produced. Over his own passions he had obtained the most complete command; and though his patience was continually put to the severest trials, yet he was never once overcome, never once betrayed into any intemperance or excess in word or deed, "never once spake unadvisedly with his lips." He endured the cruellest insults from his enemies with the utmost composure, meekness, patience,

and resignation ; displayed the most astonishing fortitude under a most painful and ignominious death ; and, to crown all, in the very midst of his torments on the cross, implored forgiveness for his murderers in that divinely charitable prayer, " Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Nor was his wisdom inferior to his virtues. The doctrines he taught were the most sublime and the most important that were ever before delivered to mankind, and every way worthy of that God, from whom he professed to derive them, and whose Son he declared himself to be.

His precepts inculcated the purest and most perfect morality ; his discourses were full of dignity and wisdom, yet

intelligible and clear ; his parables conveyed instruction in the most pleasing, familiar, and impressive manner ; and his answers to the many insidious questions that were put to him, shewed uncommon quickness of conception, soundness of judgment, and presence of mind, completely baffled all the artifices and malice of his enemies, and enabled him to elude all the snares that were laid for him. It appears then, even from this short and imperfect sketch of our Saviour's character, that he was, beyond comparison, the wisest and most virtuous person that ever appeared ; and even his bitterest enemies allow that he was so. If, then, he was confessedly so great and so good a man, it unavoidably follows that he must be, what he pretended to be, a divine person, and of course his religion also must

be divine ; for he certainly laid claim to a divine original. He asserted, that he was the Son of God ; that he and his religion came from heaven ; and that he had the power of working miracles. If this was not the case, he must, in a matter of infinite importance, have asserted what had no foundation in truth. But is such a supposition as this in the smallest degree credible ? Is it probable, is it conceivable, is it consistent with the general conduct of man, is it reconcileable with the acknowledged character of our Lord, to suppose, that any thing *but* truth could proceed from him whom his very enemies allow to have been in *every* respect (and of course in point of veracity) the best and most virtuous of men ? Was it ever known, is there a single in-

stance to be produced in the history of mankind of any one so unblemished in morals as Christ confessedly was, persisting for so great a length of time as he did in assertions, which, if untrue, would be repugnant to the clearest principles of morality, and most fatal in their consequences to those he loved best, his followers and his friends? Is it possible, that the pure, the upright, the pious, the devout, the meek, the gentle, the humane, the merciful Jesus, could engage multitudes of innocent and virtuous people in the belief and support of a religion which he knew must draw on them persecution, misery and death, unless he had been authorized by God himself to establish that religion; and unless he was conscious that he possessed the power of amply recompensing those who prefer-

red his religion to every other consideration ? The common sense and common feelings of mankind must revolt at such a preposterous idea.

It follows, then, that Christ was, in truth, a divine teacher, and his religion the gift of God.

PROPOSITION VI.

THE sublimity of our Lord's doctrines and the purity of his moral precepts confirm the belief of his divine mission.

THERE is no where to be found such important information, and such just and noble sentiments concerning God and Religion, as in the scriptures of the new testament.

They teach us, in the first place, that there is one Almighty Being, who created all things, of infinite power, wisdom, justice, mercy, goodness ; that he is the governor and preserver of this world, which he has made ; that his providential care is over all his works ;

and that he more particularly regards the affairs and conduct of men. They teach us, that we are to worship this great Being in spirit and in truth; and that the love of him is the first and great commandment, the source and spring of all virtue. They teach us, more particularly, how to pray to him, and for that purpose supply us with a form of prayer, called the Lord's Prayer, "which is a model of calm and rational devotion, and which for its conciseness, its clearness, its suitability to every condition, and for the weight, solemnity, and real importance of its petitions, is without an equal or a rival."* They teach us, moreover, what we all feel to be true, that the human heart is weak and corrupt; that man is fallen from his

* Paley.

original innocence ; that he is restored however, to the favor of God, and the capacity of happiness, by the death and mediation and atonement of Christ, who is the way, the truth, and the life ; and that he will be assisted in his sincere, though imperfect, endeavors after holiness, by the influence of God's holy spirit.

They assure us, in fine, that the soul does not perish with the body, but shall pass, after death, into another world ; that all mankind shall rise from the grave, and stand before the judgment seat of Christ, who shall reward the virtuous, and punish the wicked, in a future and eternal state of existence, according to their [deserts.] +

These are the great, and interesting,

+ used in a qualified sense.

and momentous truths, either wholly unknown, or but very imperfectly known to the world before ; and they render the meanest peasant in this country better acquainted with the nature of the Supreme Being, and the relation in which we stand to him, than were any of the greatest sages of ancient times.

Equally excellent, and superior to all other rules of life, are the moral precepts of the gospel.

Our divine Master, in the first place, laid down two great leading principles for our conduct, love to God, and love to mankind ; and thence deduced (as occasions offered, and incidents occurred, which gave peculiar force and energy to his instructions) all the principal

duties towards God, our neighbor and ourselves.

With respect to God, we are commanded to love, fear, worship, and obey him ; to set him always before us ; to do all things to his glory ; to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness ; to resign ourselves wholly to his pleasure, and submit, with patience, cheerfulness, and resignation, to every thing he thinks fit to bring upon us.

With regard to our neighbor, we are to exercise towards him the duties of charity, justice, equity, and truth ; we are to love him as ourselves, and to do unto all men as we would they should do unto us ; a most admirable rule, which comprehends the sum and

substance of all social virtue, and which no man can mistake.

As to those duties which concern ourselves, we are commanded to keep ourselves unspotted from the world, to be temperate in all things, to keep under our body, and bring it into subjection, to preserve an absolute command over all our passions, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

These are the general directions given for our conduct in the various situations and relations of life. More particular injunctions are given in various parts of scripture, especially in our Saviour's admirable sermon from the mount, where we find a multitude of most excellent rules of life, short, sententious, solemn and important, full of wisdom and dignity, yet intelligible and clear.

But the principal excellence of the gospel morality, and that which gives it an infinite superiority over all other moral instructions, is this ; that it prefers a meek, yielding, complying, forgiving temper, to that violent, overbearing, inflexible, imperious disposition, which prevails so much in the world ; that it regulates not merely our actions, but our affections and our inclinations ; and places the check to licentiousness exactly where it ought to be, that is, on the heart ; that it forbids us to covet the praise of men in our devotions, our alms, and all our other virtues ; that it gives leading rules and principles for all the relative duties of life ; of husbands and wives, of parents and children, of masters and servants, of christian teachers and their disciples, of governors and sub-

jects ; that it commands us to be, as it were, lights in the world, and examples of good to all ; to injure no man, but to bear injuries patiently ; never to seek revenge, but return good for evil : to love our very enemies, and to forgive others as we hope to be forgiven ; to raise our thoughts and views above the present life, and to fix our affections principally on that which is to come.

But besides all this, the *manner* in which our Lord delivered all his doctrines and all his precepts ; the concise, sententious, solemn, weighty maxims into which he generally compressed them ; the easy, familiar, natural, pathetic parables in which he sometimes clothed them ; that divine authority, and those awful sanctions with

which he enforced them ; these circumstances give a weight ; and dignity and importance to the precepts of holy writ, which no other moral rules can boast.

If now we ask, as it is very natural to ask, who that extraordinary person could be, that was the author of such uncommonly excellent morality as this ? the answer is, that he was, to all outward appearance, the reputed son of a carpenter, living with his father and mother in a remote and obscure corner of the world, until the time that he assumed his public character. “ Whence, then, had this man these things, and what wisdom is this that was given unto him ?” He had evidently none of the usual means or opportunities of cultivating his under-

standing or improving his mind. He was born in a low and indigent condition, without education, without learning, without any ancient stores from whence to draw his wisdom and his morality, that were at all likely to fall into his hands. You may, perhaps, in some of the Greek or Roman writers, pick out a few of his precepts, or something like them. But what does this avail? Those writers he had never read. He had never studied at Athens or at Rome; he had no knowledge of orators or philosophers. He understood, probably, no language but his own, and had nothing to give him juster notions of virtue and religion than the rest of his countrymen and persons in his humble rank of life usually had.

His fellow laborers in this undertaking, the persons who assisted him during his life, and into whose hands his religion came after his death, were a few fishermen on the Lake of Tiberias, as unlearned and uneducated, and, for the purpose of framing rules of morality, as unpromising as himself. Is it possible, then, that such men as these could, without any assistance whatever, produce such perfect and incomparable rules of life as those of the gospel ; so greatly superior in purity, solidity, perspicuity, and universal usefulness, to all the moral lessons of all the philosophers upon earth put together ? Every man of common sense must see that this is absolutely impossible ; and that there is no other conceivable way of

accounting for this, than by admitting what these persons constantly affirmed, that their doctrines and their precepts came from the fountain of all perfection, that is from God himself.

PROPOSITION VII.

THE rapid and successful propagation of the gospel by the first teachers of it, through a large part of the world, is a proof that they were favored with divine assistance and support.

WE find in the Acts of the Apostles, and in their Epistles, that the number of converts to the Christian Religion began to increase considerably almost immediately after our Saviour's ascension, and continued increasing to an astonishing degree through every age until the final establishment of Christianity by Constantine. The first assembly which we meet with of Christ's disciples, and

that a few days after his removal from the world, consisted of 120.* About a week after this, 3000 were added in one day ;† and the number of Christians publicly baptized, and publicly associating together, were very soon increased to 5000.‡ In a few years after this, the converts were described as increasing in great numbers, in great multitudes, and even in myriads, tens of thousands :§ and multitudes both of men and women continued to be added daily ; so that within about thirty years after our Lord's death, the gospel was spread, not only throughout almost all parts of the Roman Empire, but even to Parthia and India. It appears from the Epistles written to several churches by the Apostles, that

* Acts i. 15.

† Acts ii. 41.

‡ Acts iv. 4.

§ Acts xxi. 20.

there were large congregations of Christians, both at Rome and in all the principal cities of Greece and Asia. This account is confirmed by contemporary Roman historians ; and Pliny, about eighty years after the ascension, complains that this *superstition*,* as he calls it, had seized not cities only, but the lesser towns also, and the open country ; that the Pagan temples were almost deserted, the sacred solemnities suspended, and scarce any purchasers to be found for the victims. About twenty years after this, Justin Martyr, a christian writer, declares, that there was no nation of men, whether Greeks or barbarians, not excepting even those savages that wandered in clans

* The very name by which *modern Pagans*, as well as their predecessors, the ancient Heathens, describe the Christian Religion.

from one région to another, and had no fixed habitation, who had not learned to offer prayers and thanksgivings to the Father and Maker of all, in the name of Jesus, who was crucified. And thus the Church of Christ went on increasing more and more, till, under Constantine, the empire became christian ; at which time there is every reason to believe that the christians were more numerous and more powerful than the Pagans.

In what manner, now, can we account for this wonderful and unexampled progress of the Christian Religion ?

If this religion had set out with flattering the corrupt passions of mankind, and held up to them the prospect of

power, wealth, rank, or pleasure as the rewards of their conversion ; if it had foothed their vices, humored their prejudices, and encouraged their ancient superstitions ; if the persons who taught it had been men of brilliant talents, or commanding eloquence ; if they had first proposed it in times of darkness and ignorance, and among savage and barbarous nations ; if they had been seconded by all the influence and authority of the great potentates of the earth, or propagated their doctrines at the head of a victorious army, one might have seen some reason for their extraordinary success.

But it is well known that the very reverse of all this was the real truth of the case. It is well known, that the first preachers of the gospel declared

open war against all the follies, the vices, the interests, the inveterate prejudices, and favorite superstitions of the world ; that they were (with few exceptions) men of no abilities, no learning, no artificial rhetoric or powers of persuasion ; that their doctrines were promulgated in an enlightened age, and to the most polished nations, and had all the wit and learning, and eloquence and philosophy of the world to contend with : and that, instead of being aided by the authority and influence of the civil powers, they were opposed, and harrassed, and persecuted by them, even to death, with the most unrelenting cruelty ; and all those who embraced their doctrines were exposed to the same hardships and sufferings.

Is it now credible, that, under these circumstances, twelve poor illiterate

fishermen of Galilee should be able, merely by their own natural powers, to spread their new religion in so short a space, over so large a part of the then known world, without any assistance or co-operation from any quarter whatever? Did any thing of the kind ever happen in the world, before or since?

It is plainly unprecedented and impossible. As, therefore, all *human* means of success were against them, what else but *supernatural* means were left for them? It is clear almost to demonstration, that they must have been endowed with those miraculous powers, and favored with that divine assistance to which they pretended, and which of course proved them to be the messengers of Heaven.

PROPOSITION VIII.

A COMPARISON between Christ and Mahomet, and their respective religions, lead us to conclude, that as the religion of the latter is confessedly the invention of man, that of the former is derived from God,

THERE is a religion in the world, called the mahometan, which is professed in one part of Europe, and most parts of Asia and Africa. The founder of this religion, Mahomet, pretended to be a prophet sent from God ; but it is universally allowed, by all who are not Mahometans, and who have searched very carefully into the pretensions of this teacher, that he was an enthu-

fiaſt and an impoſtor, and that his religion was a contrivance of his own. Even thoſe perſons who reject Chriſtianty, do not think Mahometaniſm to be true ; nor do we ever hear of a Deiſt embracing it from conviction.

Here, then, we have two religions co-exiſting together in the world, and both pretending to be revelations from heaven ; one of theſe we know to be a fraud, the other we affirm and believe to be true. If this be ſo, upon comparing them and their authors together, we may expect to find a moſt marked and eſſential difference between them, ſuch a difference as may naturally be ſuppoſed to exiſt between an impoſtor and a divine teacher, between truth and falſehood. And this, I apprehend, will appear to be actually the caſe with

respect to Christ and Mahomet, and their respective religions.

Mahomet was a man of considerable rank in his own country ; he was the grandson of a man of the most powerful and honorable family in Mecca, and, though not born to a great fortune, he soon acquired one by marriage. These circumstances would of themselves, without any supernatural assistance, greatly contribute to the success of his religion. A person considerable by his wealth, of high descent, and nearly allied to the chiefs of his country, taking upon himself the character of a religious teacher in an age of ignorance and barbarism, could not fail of attracting attention and followers.

Christ did not possess these advantages of rank and wealth, and powerful connexions. He was born of parents in a very mean condition of life. His relations and friends were all in the same humble situation ; he was bred up in poverty, and continued in it all his life, having frequently no place where he could lay his head. A man so circumstanced was not likely, by his own personal influence, to force a new religion, much less a false one, upon the world.

Mahomet indulged himself in the grossest pleasures. He perpetually transgressed even those licentious rules which he had prescribed to himself. He made use of the power he had acquired, to gratify his passions without control, and he laid claim to a special

permission from heaven to riot in the most unlimited sensuality.

Jesus, on the contrary, preserved throughout life the most unblemished purity and sanctity of manners. He did no sin, but was perfectly holy and undefiled. Not the least stain was ever thrown on his moral character by his bitterest enemies.

Mahomet was violent, impetuous, and sanguinary.

Christ was meek, gentle, benevolent, and merciful.

Mahomet pretended to have secret communications with God, and with the angel Gabriel, which no other person ever saw or heard.

Jefus was repeatedly declared to be the Son of God by voices from heaven, which were plainly and diftinctly heard and recorded by others.

The appearance of Mahomet was not foretold by ancient prophecies, nor was there at the time any expectation of fuch a person in that part of the world.

The appearance of Chrift upon earth was clearly and repeatedly predicted by feveral ancient prophecies, which moft evidently applied to him and to no other ; and which were in the keeping of thofe who were professed enemies to him and his religion. And there was at the time of his birth a general expectation over all the Eaft, that fome great and extraordinary person-

age would then manifest himself to the world,

Mahomet never presumed to foretell any future events, for this plain reason, because he could not foresee them ; and had he foretold any thing which did not come to pass, it must have entirely ruined his credit with his followers.

Christ foretold many things which did actually come to pass, particularly his own death and resurrection, and the destruction of Jerusalem.

Mahomet never pretended to work miracles ; on the contrary, he expressly disclaimed any such power, and makes several labored and awkward apologies for not possessing it.

Jesus, we all know, worked a great number of the most astonishing miracles in the open face of day, and in the sight of great multitudes of people. He made the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak, the lame to walk, the blind to see, and even the dead to rise from the grave.

Mahomet, during the first twelve years of his mission, made use only of argument and persuasion, and in consequence of that gained very few converts. In three years he made only fourteen profelytes, and in seven only eighty three men and eighteen women.

In the same space of time our Saviour and his Apostles converted thousands and tens of thousands, and spread

the Christian Religion over a great part of Asia.

Mahomet told the Jews, the Christians, and the Arabs, that he taught no other religion than that which was originally taught to their forefathers, by Abraham, Ismael, Moses, and Jesus. This would naturally prejudice them in favor of his religion.

Christ preached a religion which directly opposed the most favorite opinions and prejudices of the Jews, and subverted, from the very foundation, the whole system of pagan superstition.

Mahomet paid court to the peculiar weaknesses and propensities of his disciples. In that warm climate, where all the passions are ardent and violent, he

allowed them a liberal indulgence in sensual gratifications ; no less than four wives to each of his followers, with the liberty of divorcing them thrice.*

In the same climate, and among men of the same strong passions, Jesus most peremptorily restrained all his followers from adultery, fornication, and every kind of impurity. He confined them to one wife, and forbade divorce, except for adultery only. But what was still more, he required them to govern their eyes and their thoughts, and to check the very first rising of any criminal desire in the soul. He told them, that whoever looked upon a woman, to lust after her, had commit-

* Koran c. 4. p. 42. Ib. c. 2. p. 41.

ted adultery with her already in his heart ; and he assured them, that none but the pure in heart should see God. He declared open war, in short, against all the criminal passions, and evil inclinations of mankind, and expressly required all his followers to renounce those favorite sins that did most easily beset them ; nay, even to leave father, mother, brethren, sisters, houses, lands, and every thing that was most dear to them, and take up their cross and follow him.

With the same view above mentioned of bribing men to embrace his religion, Mahomet promised to reward his followers with the delights of a most voluptuous paradise, where the objects of their affection were to be almost innumerable, and all of them

gifted with transcendent beauty and eternal youth.*

Christ entirely precluded his disciples from all hopes of sensual indulgences hereafter, assuring them that in heaven they should neither marry nor be given in marriage, and promising them nothing but pure celestial spiritual joys, such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.

Besides the powerful attractions of sensual delights, Mahomet had another, still more efficacious mode of producing conviction, and gaining profelytes ; and that was, force, violence, and arms. He propagated his religion by the sword ; and, till he made use of that

* Koran, c. 56. p. 413.

instrument of conversion, the number of his profelytes was a mere nothing. He was at once a prophet, a warrior, a general, and a conqueror. It was at the head of his armies that he preached the koran. His religion and his conquests went on together ; and the former never advanced one step without the latter. He commanded in person in eight general engagements, and undertook, by himself and his lieutenants, fifty military enterprizes. Death or conversion was the only choice offered to idolaters, and tribute or conversion to Jews and Christians.

Jesus employed no other means of converting men to his religion, but persuasion, argument, exhortation, miracles, and prophecies. He made use of no other force but the force of

truth ; no other sword but the sword of the spirit, that is, the word of God. He had no arms, no legions to fight his cause. He was the prince of peace, and preached peace to all the world. Without power, without support, without any followers but twelve poor humble men, without one circumstance of attraction, influence, or compulsion, he triumphed over the prejudices, the learning, the religion of his country ; over the ancient rites, idolatry, and superstition, over the philosophy, wisdom, and authority of the whole Roman Empire.

The great object of Mahomet was to make his followers soldiers, and to inspire them with a passion for violence, bloodshed, vengeance, and persecution. He was continually exhorting them to

fight for the religion of God : and, to encourage them to do so, he promised them the highest honors, and the richest rewards, in paradise. “ They who have suffered for my sake, and have been slain in battle, verily I will expiate their evil deeds from them, and I will surely bring them into a garden watered by rivers, a reward from God, and with God is most excellent reward.”* This duty of waring against infidels is frequently inculcated in the the koran, and highly magnified by the Mahomedan divines, who call the sword *the key of heaven and hell*, and persuade their people that the least drop of blood spilt in the way of God, as it is called, is most acceptable unto him ; and that the defending the territories

* Koran, ch. 3. p. 91. and c. 9. p. 242.

of the Moslems for one night, is of more avail than a fast of two months.* It is easy to see to what a degree of fierceness this must raise all the furious vindictive passions of the soul, and what a horde of savages and barbarians it must let loose upon mankind.

The directions of Christ to his disciples were of a different temper. He positively forbade them the use of any violence whatever. The sword that was drawn by one of them in his defence he ordered to be sheathed: "Put up thy sword within the sheath; they that use the sword shall perish by the sword."† He would not consent to bring down fire from Heaven on the

* Sale's Prelim. Diss. f. 11. p. 189.

† Matth. xxvi. 52; John xviii. 11.

Samaritans, who had refused to receive him : “ The Son of man,” he told them, “ came not to destroy men’s lives, but to save them. Peace I leave with you ; my peace I give unto you. Do violence to no man ; resist not evil. Be ye merciful, even as your Father in Heaven is merciful. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”*

The consequence was, that the first followers of Mahomet were men of cruelty and violence, living by rapine, murder, and plunder. The first followers of Jesus were men of meek, quiet, inoffensive, peaceable manners, and in their morals irreproachable and exemplary.

* Luke ix. 56 ; John xiv. 27 ; Luke iii. 14
Matth. v. 39 ; Luke vi. 36 ; Matth. v. 7.

If now, after comparing together the authors of the two religions we have been considering, we take a short view of the sacred books of those religions, the koran and the gospel, we shall find a difference no less striking between them ; no less strongly marking the truth of the one and the falsehood of the other.

The koran is highly applauded, both by Mahomet himself and his followers, for the exquisite beauty, purity, and elegance of the language, which they represent as a standing miracle, greater than even that of raising the dead. But admitting its excellence (which yet has been questioned by several learned men) if beauty of style and composition is to be considered as a proof of divine inspiration, the writings of Plato and

Xenophon, of Cicero and Cæſar, and a multitude of other inimitable writers in various languages, will have as juſt a claim to a miraculous origin as the koran. But in truth, theſe graces of diction, ſo far from being a circumſtance favorable to the koran, create a ſtrong ſuſpicion of its being a human fabrication, calculated to charm and captivate men by the arts of rhetoric and the fascination of words, and thus draw off their attention from the utility of its matter, and the weakneſs of its pretenſions. Theſe are the artifiſes of fraud and falſehood. The goſpel wants them not. It diſdains the aid of human eloquence, and depends ſolely on the force of truth and the power of God for its ſucceſs. “ I came not (as St. Paul ſublimely expreſſes himſelf) with excellency of ſpeech, nor with the

enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the spirit and of power, that your faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God."*

BUT, whatever may be the purity of the language, the matter and substance of the koran cannot bear a moment's comparison with that of the gospel. The narrative is dull, heavy, monotonous, uninteresting ; loaded with endless repetitions, with senseless and preposterous fables, with trivial, disgusting, and even immoral precepts. Add to this, that it has very little novelty or originality to recommend it, the most material parts of it being borrowed from the scriptures of the old

* 1. Cor. ii. 1, 4, 5.

testament or the new ; and even these are so disguised and deformed by passing through the hands of the impostor (who vitiates and debases every thing he touches) that you can hardly know them to be the same incidents or transactions that you read with so much delight in the bible.

The gospel, on the contrary, is every where concise, simple, original, animated, interesting, dignified ; its precepts important, its morality perfect, its sentiments sublime, its views noble and comprehensive, its sanctions awful.

In the koran, Mahomet is perpetually boasting of his own merits and achievements, and the supreme excellence of his book. In the gospel, no encomiums are bestowed by the Evangelists,

either on themselves or their writings. Even the virtues of their divine Master are not distinctly specified, or brought forward into a conspicuous point of view. It is from his actions only, and his discourses, not from the observations of his historians, that we can collect the various transcendent excellencies of his character. Here we plainly see the sober modesty of truth opposed to the ostentatious vanity of imposture.

In the description of future rewards and punishments, the koran is minute, circumstantial, and extravagant, both in painting the horrors of the one and the delights of the other. It describes things which cannot, and ought not to be described, and enters into details too horrible, or too licentious, to be presented to the human mind.

In the gospel the pains and the pleasures of a future life are represented concisely, in strong, but general and indefinite terms, sufficient to give them a powerful, but not an overwhelming, influence over the mind.

There is still another, and a very material mark of discrimination between the koran and the gospel. Mahomet shows throughout the utmost anxiety to guard against objections, to account for his working no miracles, and to defend his conduct, in several instances, against the charges which he suspects may be brought against him. This is always the case with imposture. It is always suspicious, afraid of being detected, alive to every appearance of hostility, solicitous to anticipate, and

eager to repel the accusations of enemies.

Truth has no occasion for such precautions, and therefore never uses them. We see nothing of this sort in the gospel. The sacred historians show not the smallest solicitude, nor take the least pains to obviate cavils or remove difficulties. They relate plainly and simply what they know to be true. They entertain no doubt of it themselves, and seem to have no suspicion that any one else can doubt it; they therefore leave the facts to speak for themselves, and send them unprotected into the world, to make their way (as they have done) by their own native force and incontrovertible truth.

Such are the leading features of Mahomet and his religion on the one

hand, and of Christ and his religion on the other; and never was there a stronger or more striking contrast seen than in this instance. They are, in short, in every essential article, the direct opposites of each other. And as it is on all hands acknowledged that Mahomet was an impostor, it is fair to conclude that Christ, who was the very reverse of Mahomet, was the reverse of an impostor, that is, a real messenger from heaven. In Mahomet we see every distinctive mark of fraud; in Jesus, not one of these is to be found; but, on the contrary, every possible indication and character of truth.

PROPOSITION IX.

THE predictions delivered by the ancient Prophets, and fulfilled in our Saviour, show that he was the MESSIAH expected by the Jews, and that he came into the world by divine appointment, to be the great deliverer and redeemer of mankind.

THE word Messiah signifies anointed ; that is, a person appointed to some high station, dignity, or office ; because originally among the eastern nations men so appointed (particularly kings, priests, and prophets) were anointed with oil. Hence the word MESSIAH means the person pre-ordained and appointed by God to be the great deliverer of the Jewish nation, and the

redeemer of all mankind. The word Christ means the same thing.

Now it was foretold concerning the Messiah, that he should come before the sceptre departed from Judah, that is, before the Jewish government was destroyed ;* and, accordingly, Christ appeared a short time before the period when the Jewish government was totally overthrown by the Romans.

It was foretold that he should come before the destruction of the second temple. “ The desire of all nations
“ shall come, and I will fill this house
“ with glory saith the Lord of Hosts ;
“ the glory of this latter house shall be
“ greater than that of the former.”†

* Gen. xlix. 10.

† Haggai, ii. 7. 9.

Accordingly Christ appeared some time before the destruction of the city and the temple of Jerusalem by the Romans.

It was foretold by the Prophet Daniel, that he should come at the end of 490 years after the rebuilding of Jerusalem, which had been laid waste during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, and that he should be cut off; and that afterwards the city and sanctuary of Jerusalem should be destroyed and made desolate.* And accordingly, at what time soever the beginning of the 490 years can, according to any fair interpretation of the words, be fixed, the end of them will fall about the time of Christ's appearing; and it is well known how entirely the city and sanctuary were destroyed by

* Dan. ix. 26.

the Romans some years after he was cut off and crucified.

It was foretold, that he should perform many great and beneficial miracles ; that the eyes of the blind should be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped ; that the lame man should leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing ;* and this we know was literally fulfilled in the miracles of Christ ; the blind received their sight, the lame walked, the deaf heard.

It was foretold, that he should die a violent death ; that he should be wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities ; that the chastisement of our peace should be upon him ; and that with his stripes

* *Isaiah, xxxv. 5.*

we should be healed ; that God would lay on him the iniquity of us all.* All which was exactly accomplished in the sufferings of Christ, “ who died for our sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God.”†

It was foretold, that to him should the gathering of the people be ; and that God would give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for his possession,‡ which was punctually fulfilled by the wonderful success of the gospel, and its universal propagation throughout the world.

* Isaiah, liii. throughout, and Dan. ix. 26.

† 1 Pet. iii. 18.

‡ Psalm, ii. 8.

Lastly, many minuter circumstances were told of the great deliverer, or redeemer, that was to come.

That he should be born of a virgin ; that he should be of the tribe of Judah and the seed of David ; that he should be born in the town of Bethlehem ; that he should ride upon an ass in humble triumph into the city of Jerusalem ; that he should be a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief ; that he should be sold for thirty pieces of silver ; that he should be scourged, buffeted, and spit upon ; that he should be numbered with the transgressors (that is, should be crucified, as he was, between two thieves ;) that he should have gall and vinegar given him to drink ; that they who saw him crucified should mock at him, and at his

trusting in God to deliver him ; that the foldiers should cast lots for his garments ; that he should make his grave with the rich ; and that he should rise again without feeling corruption.* All these circumstances, it is well known, were foretold, and, to the greatest possible exactness, fulfilled, in the person of Christ.

What now shall we say to these things ? Here are upwards of twenty different particulars, many of them of a very extraordinary nature, which, it was foretold, 700 years before our Saviour was born, would all meet in him, and which did all actually meet in his person. Is not this a most extraordi-

* *Isaiah*, vii. 14 ; *Mich.* v. *Zech.* ix. 9 ; *Isaiah*, liii. 3 ; *Zech.* xi. 12 ; *Isaiah*, l. 6 ; *Isaiah* liii. 12 ; *Psalms* lxix. 22 ; *Psalms* xxiv. 7, 18 : *Isaiah*, liii. 9 ; *Psalms* xvi. 10.

nary consideration? There are but three possible suppositions that can be made concerning it: either that this was a mere fortuitous coincidence, arising entirely from chance and accident, or that these prophecies were written after the events had taken place; or lastly, that they were real predictions, delivered many years before these events came to pass, and all fulfilled in Christ. That any one should by chance hit upon so many things, which should all prove true, and prove true concerning one and the same person, though several of them were of such a nature as were unlikely to happen *singly*, and by far the greatest part of which had never before happened *singly*, to *any person whatever*; this, I say, exceeds all bounds of credibility, and all power of conjecture or calculation.

That these prophecies were not written or delivered after the things predicted had happened is most certain ; because they are found in books which existed long before those events came to pass, that is, in the books of the old testament ; and the Jews themselves, the mortal enemies of Christ and his religion, acknowledge that these prophecies were in those books exactly as we now see them many hundred years before Christ came into the world.

The books themselves were in their own keeping, in the keeping of our adversaries, who would undoubtedly take effectual care that nothing favorable to Christ should be fraudulently inserted into them. The Jews were our librarians. The prophecies were in their custody, and are read in all their copies of

the old testament as well as in ours. They have made many attempts to *explain* them away, but none to question their authenticity.

It remains then that these are all real predictions, all centering in our Saviour, and in him only, and delivered many centuries before he was born. As no one but God has the foreknowledge of events, it is from him these prophecies must have proceeded ; and they shew, of course, that Christ was the person whom he had for a great length of time pre-determined to send into the world to be the great deliverer, redeemer, and Saviour of mankind.

PROPOSITION X.

THE prophecies delivered by our Saviour himself, prove that he was endued with the foreknowledge of future events ; which belongs only to God and to those inspired by him.

HE did very particularly, and at several different times, foretel his own death, and the circumstances of it : that the chief priests and scribes should condemn him to death, and deliver him to the Gentiles, that is, to Pilate and the Roman soldiers, to mock, and scourge, and crucify him ; that he should be betrayed into their hands ; that Judas Iscariot was the person who should betray him ; that all his disci-

ples would forsake him, and flee ; and that Peter would particularly thrice deny him in one night. He foretold further, that he would rise again the third day ; that, after his ascension, he would send down the Holy Ghost on his Apostles, which should enable them to work many miracles. He foretold, likewise, many particulars concerning the future success of the gospel, and what should happen to several of his disciples ; he foretold what opposition and persecution they should meet with in their preaching ; he foretold what particular kind of death Peter should die, and intimated that St. John should live (as he did) till after the destruction of Jerusalem ; he foretold that, notwithstanding all opposition and persecution, the gospel should yet have such

success as to spread itself over the world ; and, lastly, he foretold the destruction of Jerusalem, with such very particular and minute circumstances, in the 24th chapter of St. Matthew, the 13th of St. Mark, and the 21st of St. Luke, that no one who reads the description of that event, in the historians of those times, can have the smallest doubt of our Saviour's divine foreknowledge. We have a most authentic, exact, and circumstantial account of the siege and destruction of that city by the Romans, written by Josephus, a Jewish and contemporary historian ; and the description he has given of this terrible calamity so perfectly corresponds with our Saviour's prophecy, that one would have thought, had we not known the contrary, that it

had been written by a Christian, on purpose to illustrate that prediction.

This power of foretelling future events is a plain proof that Christ came from God, and was endued with this power from above.

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PROPOSITION XI.

THE miracles performed by our Lord, demonstrate him to have possessed divine power.

ALTHOUGH the preceding propositions contain very convincing proofs of the divine mission of Christ, and the divine authority of his religion, yet, undoubtedly, the strongest evidence of this arises from the wonderful and well attested miracles which he wrought from the beginning to the end of his ministry. He cured the most inveterate diseases; he made the lame to walk; he opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf; he cast out devils; he walked upon the sea; he

fed five thousand persons with a few small loaves and fishes, and even raised the dead to life again. These miracles were all wrought in open day, in the sight of multitudes of witnesses, who could not be imposed upon in things which they saw plainly with their own eyes, who had an opportunity of scrutinizing them as much as they pleased, and who did actually scrutinize them with a most critical exactness, as appears from the very remarkable instance of the blind man restored to sight by our Lord, in the ninth chapter of St. John, a transaction which I recommend very earnestly to the attention of my readers.

It is true, that miracles being very unusual and extraordinary facts, they require very strong evidence to sup-

port them ; much stronger, it must be owned, than common events, that are recorded in history : and, accordingly, the miracles of Christ *have* this very strong and extraordinary evidence to support them ; evidence such as is not to be equalled in any other instance, and such as is fully competent to prove the reality of the greatest miracle that ever was performed.

Besides a multitude of other persons, who were eye witnesses to these miracles, and who were actually convinced and converted by them, there were twelve persons, called Apostles, plain, honest, unprejudiced men, whom our Saviour chose to be his constant companions and friends, who were almost always about his person, accompanied him in his travels, heard all his dis-

courses, saw all his miracles, and attended him through all the different scenes of his life, death, and resurrection, till the time of his ascension into heaven. These persons were perfectly capable of judging whether the works which they saw Jesus perform were real miracles or not ; they could tell whether a person whom they had known to be blind all his life was suddenly restored to sight by our Saviour's only speaking a word or touching his eyes ; they could tell whether he did actually, in open day light, walk upon the sea without sinking, and without any visible support ; whether a person called Lazarus, whom they were well acquainted with, and whom they knew to have been four days dead and buried, was raised to life again merely by Christ saying, *Lazarus, arise.*

In these, and other facts of this sort, they could not possibly be deceived. Now these, and many other miracles equally astonishing, they affirm that they themselves actually saw performed by our Saviour. In consequence of this, from being Jews, and of course strongly prejudiced against Christ and his outward appearance, which was the very reverse of every thing they expected in their Messiah, they became his disciples; and on account of their conversion, and more particularly on account of their asserting the truth of his miracles and his resurrection, they endured for a long course of years the severest labors, hardships, sufferings, and persecution, that human nature could be exposed to, and at last submitted to the most cruel and excruciating deaths; all which they might ea-

fly have avoided, if they would only have said that Christ was *not* the Son of God, that he never worked any miracles, and never rose from the dead. Yet this they refused to say, and were content to die rather than say it.*

Is not this giving the strongest proof of their sincerity, and of the reality of Christ's miracles, that human nature and human testimony are capable of giving. The concurrent and uncontradicted testimony of twelve such witnesses is, according to all the rules of evidence, sufficient to establish the truth of any one fact in the world, however extraordinary, however miraculous.

If there had been any powerful temptation thrown in the way of these

* No man ever laid down his life for the honor of Jupiter, Neptune, or Apollo ; but how many thousands have sealed their christian testimony with their blood ? Beattie, v. 2.

men ; if they had been bribed, like the followers of Mahomet, with sensual indulgencies ; or, like Judas Iscariot, with a sum of money, one should not have been much surpris'd at their persisting, for a time at least, in a premeditated falsehood. But when we know that, instead of any of these allurements being held out to them, their master always foretold to them, and they themselves soon found by experience, that they could gain nothing, and must lose every thing in this world, by embracing Christianity ; it is utterly impossible to account for their embracing it on any other ground than their conviction of its truth from the miracles which they saw. In fact, must they not have been absolutely mad to have incurred voluntary so much misery, and such certain destruction, for

affirming things to be true which they knew to be false ; more especially as their own religion taught them, that they would be punished most severely in another world, as well as in this, for so wicked a fraud ? Is it usual for men thus to sport with their own happiness, and their very lives, and to bring upon themselves, with their eyes open, such dreadful evils, without any reason in the world, and without the least possible benefit, advantage, credit, or pleasure resulting from it ? Where have you ever heard of any instance of this sort ? Would any twelve men you ever knew, especially men of credit and character, take it into their heads to assert that a certain person in the neighborhood raised a dead man to life, when they knew that no such thing had ever happened ; and that

they would all, with one consent, suffer themselves to be put to death rather than confess that they had told a lie? Such a thing never happened since the world began. — It is contrary to all *experience* and all *credibility*, and would be, in itself, a greater miracle than any of those that are recorded in the gospel.

It is certain then (as certain as any thing can be that depends on human testimony) that real miracles were wrought by Christ; and as no miracles can be wrought but by the power of God, it is equally certain that Christ and his religion drew their origin from God.*

* On the clear and evident marks of discrimination between the real miracles of the gospel and the pretended miracles of paganism and of popery, see Bishop Douglas's *Criterion*, and Dr. Paley's most masterly observations, in his *View of the Evidences of Christianity*, prop. i. ch. ii. b. i. p. 329.

PROPOSITION XII.

THE resurrection of our Lord from the dead, is a fact fully proved by the clearest evidence, and is the seal and confirmation of his divinity and of the truth of his religion.

THE resurrection of Christ being one of those miracles which are recorded in the gospel, the truth of it is, in fact, already proved by what has been advanced respecting those miracles in the preceding article. But it is an event so singular in its nature, and so infinitely important in its consequences, that it well deserves to be made the subject of a distinct proposition.

After our Saviour's crucifixion, Joseph of Arimathea, we are told, laid

the body in his own new tomb, hewn out of a rock, and rolled a great stone to the door of the sepulchre. In order to secure themselves against any fraud, the Jews desired the Roman governor, Pilate, to grant them a band of soldiers to guard the sepulchre, lest, as they said, the disciples should come by night and steal the corpse away. Pilate's answer was in these words, "Ye have a watch, go your way, make it as sure as you can : so they went and made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone, and setting a watch."* The Evangelist then proceeds to relate the great event of the resurrection with that ingenuous and natural simplicity which characterizes the sacred historians, and which carries upon the face of it every mark of sincerity and truth.

* Matth. xxvii. 65, 66.

“ In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalen, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. And behold there was a great earthquake ; for the Angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it. His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow. And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men. And the Angel of the Lord answered, and said unto the women, Fear not ye ; for I know that ye seek Jesus that was crucified. He is not here, for he is risen from the dead ; and behold he goeth before you into Galilee, there ye shall see him. Lo ! I have told you. And as they went to tell his disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail ;

and they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him. Then said Jesus unto them, Be not afraid ; go tell my brethren, that they go into Galilee, and there they shall see me. Now, when they were going, behold some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all that was done. And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken council, they gave large money unto the foldiers, saying, Say ye, his disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept ; and if this come to the governor's ear, we will persuade him and secure you. So they took the money, and did as they were taught ; and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews unto this day."*

* Matth. xxviii. 1, 16.

Such is the relation of this wonderful fact given by St. Matthew, which comprehends not only his own account of it, but that also which was circulated in opposition to it by the chief priests and rulers of the Jews. Here then we have fairly before us the two different representations of this event by the friends and by the enemies of Christ ; of which the former asserts that it was a real resurrection, the other that it was a fraud ; and between these two we must form our opinions, for no third story has been set up, that we know of, by any one.

One thing is agreed on by both sides, viz. that the body was not to be found in the sepulchre. It was gone ; and the question is, by what means ? The soldiers gave out that the disciples

“came by night, while they slept, and stole it away.” But it is not very easy to understand how the soldiers could depose to any thing that passed while they were fast asleep ; they could not possibly tell in what manner the body was stolen away, or by whom. Nor, considering the extreme severity of the Roman military discipline, is it credible, that if they had been asleep, they would have confessed it. For it was certain death to a Roman soldier to be found sleeping upon guard. Nothing could have prevailed upon them to make such a declaration as that, but a previous promise of impunity and reward from the Jewish rulers ; a plain proof that they had been tampered with, and that it was a concerted story.

In the next place, supposing the story true, of what use could the dead body

be to the disciples ? It could not prove to them, or to others, that their master was risen from the dead ; on the contrary, it must have been a standing and a visible proof of the contrary. It must convince them that he, instead of being the deliverer they expected, was an impostor, and they most cruelly deceived. And why they should chuse to keep in their possession, and to have continually before their eyes a lifeless corpse, which completely blasted all their hopes, and continually reminded them of their bitter disappointment, is somewhat difficult to be imagined.

The tale then, told by the soldiers, is, upon the very face of it a gross and clumsy forgery. The consequence is, that the account given by St. Matthew is the true one. For if the body was

actually gone (an acknowledged point on all sides) and if it was not, as we have proved, stolen away by the disciples, there are but two possible suppositions remaining ; either that it was taken away by the Jews and Romans, or that it was raised to life again by the power of God. If the former had been the case, it could only have been for the purpose of confronting and convicting the disciples of falsehood and fraud by the production of the dead body. But the dead body was *not* produced. It was, therefore, as the gospel affirms, raised from the grave, and restored to life. There is no other conceivable alternative left.

And that this was actually the case, is proved by our Lord's appearing, after his resurrection, not only to the

two women who came first to the sepulchre, but to the two disciples going to Emmaus, and to the disciples assembled together at two different times, and to all the apostles, and to above 500 brethren, at once. And he not only appeared to them silently, but he talked and ate with them ; he showed them his hands and his feet ; he made them handle him ; he held several long conversations with them ; and, at last, ascended up into heaven in their sight.

These were things of which the plainest and most ignorant men could judge. It was impossible for them to be deceived in an object with which they were well acquainted, and which presented itself to all their senses.

But there is another most decisive proof, arising from their own conduct,

that they were perfectly convinced of the reality of our Lord's resurrection.

It appears that the apostles were far from being men of natural courage and firmness of mind. When our Lord was apprehended, all his disciples, we are told, forsook him, and fled. Peter followed him afar off, and went into a hall in the palace of the high priests, where the servants warmed themselves, and being there charged with being a disciple of Jesus, he peremptorily denied it three times with vehemence and with oaths. It does not appear that any of his disciples attended in the judgment hall to assist or to support him ; and when he was crucified, the only persons that ventured to stand near his cross were his mother, and two or three other women, and St. John.

They all, in short, appeared dismayed and terrified with the fate of their master, afraid to acknowledge the slightest connexion with him, and utterly unable to face the dangers that seemed to menace them. But, immediately after the resurrection of their Lord, a most astonishing change took place in their conduct. From being the most timid of men, they suddenly became courageous, undaunted, and intrepid ; they boldly preached that very Jesus whom but a short time before they had deserted in his greatest distress ; and although his crucifixion was fresh before their eyes, and they had reason to expect the same or a similar fate, yet they persisted in avowing themselves his disciples, and told the Jews publicly, “ that God had made that same Jesus whom

they had crucified both Lord and Christ,"* and when they were brought before the rulers and elders to be examined respecting the lame man whom they had cured at the gate of the temple, "Be it known unto you all (said they) and to all the people, of Israel, that, by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, and whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you all. This is the stone that was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head stone of the corner; neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved."†

* Acts ii. 36.

† Acts, iv. 10, 11, 12.

And when a second time they were brought before the council, and forbidden to teach in the name of Jesus, their answer was, "We ought to obey God rather than man. And when they were again reprimanded, and threatened, and beaten, yet they ceased not in the temple, and in every house, to teach and to preach Jesus Christ; and with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."*

In what manner now shall we account for this sudden and most singular change in the disposition, and as it were in the very constitution, of the Apostles. If Christ had not risen from

* Acts, v. 29. 42. Acts, iv. 33.

the grave, and his dead body was in the possession of his disciples, was this calculated to inspire them with affection for their leader, and with courage to preach a doctrine which they knew to be false? Would it not, on the contrary, have increased their *natural timidity*, depressed their spirits, extinguished all their zeal, and filled them with indignation and horror against a man who had so grossly deceived them, and robbed them under false pretences, of every thing that was dear and valuable to them in the world? Most unquestionably it would. Nor is it possible to account, in any rational way, for the strange revolution which took place in their minds, so soon after their master's death, but by admitting that they were fully persuaded and satisfied that he rose alive from the grave.

It may be said, perhaps, that this persuasion was the effect, not of irresistible evidence, but of enthusiasm, which made them fancy that some visionary phantom, created solely by their own heated imagination, was the real body of their Lord restored to life. But nothing could be more distant from enthusiasm than the character and conduct of these men, and the courage they manifested, which was perfectly calm, sober, collected, and cool. But what completely repels this suspicion is, that their bitterest adversaries never once accused them of enthusiasm, but charged them with a crime which was utterly inconsistent with it, fraud and theft; with stealing away the body from the grave. And if they did this, if that dead body was actually before their eyes, how was it possible

for any degree of enthusiasm short of madness (which was never alledged against them) to mistake a dead body for a living man, whom they saw, and touched, and conversed with? No such instance of enthusiasm ever occurred in the world.

The resurrection of our Lord being thus established on the firmest grounds, it affords an unanswerable proof of the truth of our Saviour's pretensions, and, consequently, of the truth of his religion: for had he not been what he assumed to be, the Son of God, it is impossible that God should have raised him from the dead, and thereby given his sanction to an imposture. But as he did actually restore him to life, he thereby set his seal to the divinity which he claimed, and ac-

known him, in the most public and authoritative manner, to be "his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased."*

And this evidence of our Lord's divine mission is of the more importance, because, our Saviour himself appealed to it as the grand proof of his being sent from heaven to instruct and to redeem mankind. For when he cast the buyers and sellers out of the temple, and the Jews required of him a sign, that is, a miraculous proof, that he had the authority of God for doing those things, his answer was, destroy this temple, (meaning his body) and in three days I will raise it up. When, therefore, he was risen from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had

* Matth. iii. 17.

said this unto them ; and they believed the scriptures, and the word which Jesus had said ;”* and they themselves constantly referred to the resurrection, more than to any other evidence, as the great foundation on which their faith was built.

The reason for this, perhaps, was, that this great event contained in itself, at once, the evidence both of miracle and of prophecy. It was certainly one of the most stupendous manifestations of divine power that could be presented to the observation of mankind ; and it was, at the same time, the completion of two most remarkable prophecies ; that of our Saviour’s above mentioned, and that well known one of king David’s, which St.

* John ii. 19, 22.

Peter expressly applies to the resurrection of Christ : “ Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thy holy one to see corruption.”*

* Psalm xvi. 10. Acts, ii. 27. On this subject of Christ's resurrection I must again refer my young readers to Dr. Paley, vol. ii. ch. ix. p. 209. and also to the conclusion of his work ; the force of which it seems to me scarce possible for an unprejudiced reader to withstand.



CONCLUSION.

THESE are the principal proofs of the truth of the Christian Religion. Many others of a very satisfactory nature might be added ; but the question may be safely rested on those that have here been stated.

And when we collect them all together into one point of view ; when we consider the deplorable ignorance and inconceivable depravity of the heathen world before the birth of Christ, which rendered a divine interposition essentially necessary, and therefore highly probable ; the appearance

of Christ upon earth, at the very time when his presence was most wanted, and when there was a general expectation throughout the East, that some great and extraordinary personage was soon to come into the world ; the transcendent excellence of our Lord's character, so infinitely beyond that of every other moral teacher ; the calmness, the composure, the dignity, the integrity, the spotless sanctity of his manners, so utterly inconsistent with every idea of enthusiasm or imposture ; the sublimity and importance of his doctrines ; the consummate wisdom and perfect purity of his moral precepts, far exceeding the natural powers of a man born in the humblest situation, and in a remote and obscure corner of the world, without learning, education, languages, or

books ; the rapid and astonishing propagation of his religion, in a very short space of time, through almost every region of the East, by the sole efforts of himself and a few illiterate fishermen, in direct opposition to all the power, the authority, the learning, the philosophy, the reigning vices, prejudices, and superstitions of the world ; the complete and marked opposition, in every essential point, between the character and religion of Christ and the character and religion of Mahomet, exactly such as might be expected between truth and falsehood ; the minute description of all the most material circumstances of his birth, life, sufferings, death, and resurrection, given by the ancient prophets many hundred years before he was born, and exactly fulfilled in him, and him only, point-

ing him out as the Messiah of the Jews and the redeemer of mankind ; the various prophecies delivered by Christ himself, which were all punctually accomplished, more especially the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans ; the many astonishing miracles wrought by Jesus, in the open face of day, before thousands of spectators, the reality of which is proved by multitudes of the most unexceptionable witnesses, who sealed their testimony with their blood, and was even acknowledged by the earliest and most inveterate enemies of the gospel ; and, lastly, that most astonishing and well authenticated miracle of our Lord's resurrection, which was the seal and confirmation of his own divine origin, and that of his religion ; when all these various evidences

are brought together, and impartially weighed, it seems hardly within the power of a fair and ingenuous mind to resist the impression of their united force. If such a combination of evidence as this is not sufficient to satisfy an honest inquirer into truth, it is utterly impossible that any event, which passed in former times, and which we did not see with our own eyes, can ever be proved to have happened, by any degree of testimony whatever. It may safely be affirmed, that no instance can be produced of any one fact or event, said to have taken place in past ages, and established by such evidence as that on which the christian revelation rests, that afterwards turned out to be false. We challenge the enemies of our faith to bring forward, if they

can, any such instance. If they cannot (and we know it to be impossible) we have a right to say, that a religion, supported by such an extraordinary accumulation of evidence, must be true ; and that all men, who pretend to be guided by argument and by proof, are bound, by the most sacred obligations, to receive the religion of Christ as a real revelation from God.



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